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PROGRAM Evans & Novak

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Q SUBJECT Interview With Senator Patrick Leahy

ANNOUNCER: From Washington, Roland Evans and Robert Novak bring you the people who are the news on "Evans & Novak."

5 ROBERT NOVAK: I'm Robert Novak. Roland Evans and I will question an authoritative insider about the mysterious game of intelligence and counterintelligence.

5 ROLAND EVANS. He is Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, the Vice-chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Soviet KGB agent Vitaly Yurchenko defected to the United States in Rome last August. Three months later, he walked out of the Au Pied DeCochon Restaurant in Georgetown, leaving his CIA escort behind, and turned himself in to the Soviet Embassy in Washington.

Going before television cameras, he told the world a story that hurt the U.S. and that seemed incredible.

[Film clip of press conference].

VOICE OF TRANSLATOR: I was kept in isolation, forced to take some drugs, and denied the possibility to get in touch with official Soviet representatives.

[End clip].

EVANS: At the same time, unconnected, a front page story in the Washington Post claimed that the CIA is plotting to destabilize Libya's strongman, Muammar Quaddafi. These and other spy cases show that the

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intelligence and counterintelligence game is reaching toughest point ever in peacetime.

We're interviewing Senator Leahy of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Capitol Hill.

Senator, in view of the accummulating data that's coming in, do you agree on the Yurchenko case? Do you agree that the CIA has conducted itself to make a major fiasco of the intelligence game?

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: I have some real problems with the Yurchenko case. Here on the one hand you've got a case where the man truly was a defector, handled badly, went back, caused a major embarrassment to the United States, and that's bad. Or, they have a case where he was a double agent all along. Then you have a calamity. That means he got through the screening procedures that the CIA has developed.

NOVAK: We'll be back to talk more about the Yurchenko case, the Quaddafi leak and other intelligence matters, after these messages.

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NOVAK: Senator Leahy, in answer to my partner's question, you said that Yurchenko was either a genuine double defector or he was a Soviet plant. If it wasn't a coup to the intelligence aparatus in this town, which was it in your opinion?

SENATOR LEAHY: In my opinion, I really think that he was a double agent, a plant. I hope I'm wrong. I really hope I'm wrong, because the implications of that are horrendous.

I should say, to be totally clear to the CIA, they feel strongly that he was -- they say he was -- a defector who then decided to redefect. They are the people with the experience. They feel strongly that that's what he was. I don't -- I think he was a double agent. I don't know if we'll ever know for sure, and I sure hope I'm wrong.

NOVAK: You have an independent source of information to base that?

SENATOR LEAHY: No, no. I have the information that we have received and in fact most of the information that we've seen has really been in the public press sometimes either as past or before we received it. But I just find it very, very hard to believe that somebody this high up in the KGB would come in, defect, and say, well, I can just concoct this crazy story that I was drugged, kidnapped, brought out of Italy against my -- my will, and then walk back into the Soviet Embassy and think he's going to get the Order of Lenin instead of the order of Lubianka Prison.

NOVAK: Ok, let's say that he was a Soviet plant. What are they up to, do you think?

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SENATOR LEAHY: Well, the KGB has suffered some real blows in the past year or so. Look at the number that were kicked out of France, the number kicked out of Great Britain, a major defector in London. And they've had a number of other failures that have not been made public, and I think they've been reeling by it. They're so paranoid anyway and the paranoia increased, and I think what they're trying to do is say, ok, let's show that the CIA's not infallible. We're not the only ones that make mistakes. And -- and that may be it. He's a double agent.

NOVAK: Ok, now you said in answer to Mr. Evans' opening question if that were the case this would be a real catastrophe because it would show that the Soviets could penetrate the CIA's screening. What do you do about that? You're in charge of oversight of the intelligence aparatus. Do you start a big investigation? Do we talk about the question of whether William Casey should be retained as Director of Central Intelligence?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I hope we don't make the mistake of thinking we're going to have some great big major open hearing on this quite frankly, and I don't think there's anybody -- I don't stand behind anybody who my desire for open government, but this is one area where you don't. But I also think it's incumbent upon us to go back and find out exactly how the polygraphs are used. When? Where? How? Who were the experts brought in? Were there psychologists, psychiatrists? Because we deal with defectors all the time. I mean, he's not the only defector that scolded this country, and he's probably not the only one to come this year.

But, we also have a certain number of defectors come that we discover are double agents.

EVANS: Senator, there are elements, though, of the CIA conduct where it is known as a calamity, or whether he was a plant or whether it was just a disaster, that he was a genuine defector. And it seems to me that, really, of huge magnitude.

The CIA and the Administration advertised this as a great intelligence coup. Do you think they should have done that?

SENATOR LEAHY: No.

EVANS: In fact, they say that he was one of the top -- one of the top KGB agents ever to be -- ever to be gotten by the United States, the number four or five. He was only a colonel. He worked in an office with many generals. Do you think that was wise?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I'm not ready to accept that he was only a colonel. I think he's one of the significant KGB persons. I don't think it's wise to go and broadcast how or how high he was.

I mean, we didn't even discuss his name among ourselves -- those of us who knew about him. Then one day I pick up the paper and here's a

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reprint of an affidavit filed out in New Mexico giving his name and everything else about him. The first thing I did was pick up the phone and call someone on the Committee. I said, I can't believe this. I mean, was this really put on in the public?

I think there is too much public discussion about it.

EVANS: Why?

SENATOR LEAHY: I don't know.

EVANS: Why do they do that?

SENATOR LEAHY: Probably to show that we can win some, too. Well, the trouble is we win a lot of things, and the ones that we're really most successful with are the ones we don't talk about because we might want to do it again.

I think that there was too much public discussion of this. Either too many people were too willing to say look how great we've been.

In the espionage area, in the spy area and the counterintelligence area, you hope that some day 30 or 40 years from now somebody writes a book and says how smart you were. That's the best way to do it.

EVANS: Do you think it is right for one CIA agent to come into Georgetown, this place is so crowded on a Saturday night with dinners and people playing in the streets, drinking, and have dinner with a man of this substance who could be kidnapped just like that if he were a legitimate defector?

SENATOR LEAHY: No.

EVANS: Why did they allow that this to happen? William Casey....

SENATOR LEAHY: That's a question the CIA should be asked. You're free to ask them.

We will ask them. We will ask them that question. I think when you have somebody -- assuming now taking their position on it that this was a legitimate defector who redefected, whether to have him here this short a period of time long before he's re-established a new life or something like that, you don't bring him to dinner in a place familiar to him. He knows that he's a ten or fifteen minute walk to the Soviet Consulate so you really don't do that.

EVANS: Well, let me ask you this. There as a great deal of criticism of Stansfield Turner's regime as head of the CIA under President Carter. Perhaps it was unfair, but one part of that criticism was that he really gutted the professionals, particularly those in the counter-intelligence service of the CIA. I have heard just around here in the last

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few days, talking to men who were high in that Administration and the early part of the Reagan Administration that this was -- this left Bill Casey in a very difficult position. He had lost the professionals. Do you think that's accurate?

SENATOR LEAHY: No, I think that we've seen a steady increase in -- starting in the Carter years, something gone easier now from testimony from the Reagan Administration -- starting in the Carter years and increasing steadily through the Reagan years, who's drawn bipartisan support of the Congress in the counterintelligence area. And Bill Casey has done a very, very good job in that area.

I should say even right now, even though I'm appalled at what happened in this case, totally critical of what happened in this case, I think that there have been a whole lot of areas where Bill Casey's done a good job.

NOVAK: You don't -- you don't think that this is the reason for getting into an inquest, private or public, to, say, truly have a new Director of Central Intelligence?

SENATOR LEAHY: I think what we'll do, quite frankly, and maybe this is my nature, but I'd like to have the facts before I jumped into something, and I'd like to see us go back and find the facts of exactly what happened.

Now the question of whether people cut out or not during Admiral Turner's time and added to during Bill Casey's time I think all of us -- without going into the number of people working for the CIA -- know that there are enough people around so that you can have more than one person go to dinner with a prime defector.

NOVAK: You know, this has raised a lot of questions that haven't been raised in a few years, and that is how good is the CIA? If there's anybody in this town who is not a member of the CIA who ought to be able to answer that question, it's the Vice-chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. How good is it?

SENATOR LEAHY: I think it's the best intelligence service in the world, and I think it still has a long way to go.

I think that there has -- there was a tendency for a period of time to look at all the gee-whiz things. I mean, our satellite capabilities and all are enormous. Nobody can duplicate that. And people, after a while, will get almost seduced by that and forget that you have to laborers and counterintelligence people.

NOVAK: And spies.

SENATOR LEAHY: And spies. I mean real spies, not just somebody

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who's going to read books, but real spies. And I think in Director Casey -- and Lord knows, we've had our disagreements, some public and some private, but I give him credit for bringing along a lot of the examiners I think we need. I think it's the best in the world.

Is it the best that it could be? No, not by a long shot.

NOVAK: One more question for Senator Leahy on the Yurchenko affair.

I have heard the theory by a former operations man in the CIA that the reason -- assuming he was a plant -- the reason they put him in here was to show the KGB agents just how easy it was to penetrate. We've got the Strategic Defense Initiative. We've got a lot of secrets out here and, boys, look how you can get through this screening. You think there's any truth to that?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I think I've probably talked with the same person you have and heard that theory. That's one of the things I want to look at. That's why I want to find out if he is a double agent. If it is, or if he was a double agent the theory lends credence to that, and that's why I say if he was a double agent we've got a calamity on our hands.

EVANS: Senator Leahy, I've heard a theory that I'd like to ask you about. It sound preposterous, but I'll give it to you.

There is in fact a Soviet mole within the CIA today. Would you totally discount that possibility?

You know what I mean by mole?

SENATOR LEAHY: I understand what you mean by mole. In any organization that large, of course I wouldn't. I wouldn't discount that theory.

In fact, the CIA, I suspect, operates day-by-day on the assumption that there's a possibility, and they continually look for it. Then the question, even if there was, so what? And I don't mean that in a -- I really don't mean that in a sort of an off-hand way. The question is, if there is one, where? And what can -- what can they do?

If there is, you would assume that the Western intelligence services would try to penetrate whatever other areas of government they might want to. The question is, where and how, and what do they accomplish?

EVANS: We read in the paper here the other day, a screaming headline, about a CIA plan approved by the President to destabilize Libya's Colonel Quadaffi. You probably know a great deal about this that you don't want to tell me, but can you tell me whether -- what can you tell me?

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SENATOR LEAHY: I cannot comment on that thing at all. I was, in fact I read that article in the newspaper while flying up to Vermont. I picked up the paper at the airport, got on the plane, went through all the other parts of the paper, all important things like the sports page, funnies, and so on. I got to the front page and looked at that, and I think I had terribly shocked an elderly woman sitting in front of me by the language I used at that time. I was so angry. In fact, I called Dave Durenberger as soon as I landed, and apparently he had exactly the same reaction.

EVANS: Senator Durenberger of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

But that sounds to me, sir, if I may be so bold -- that certainly indicates to me that you knew something was going on.

SENATOR LEAHY: What I'm saying....

EVANS: With that reaction.

SENATOR LEAHY: No, my reaction to have any story of this nature on -- on the front page of the paper, obviously leaked by somebody, whether it is true or not....

EVANS: [Words unintelligible].

SENATOR LEAHY: No, it's not true, because -- and I don't intend to suggest whether it's true or not. What I'm concerned about is why. These kinds of articles are obviously leaked by people who want to influence policy one way or the other who don't realize the danger they're doing to the country.

EVANS: Do you agree, sir, as a result of that leak, as of today, has been a tremendous boost for Quadaffi's seizing power within the Arab world and the Islamic world? He is the only one targeted by the United States.

SENATOR LEAHY: I -- I won't even go into speculation of what it might do. My concern -- and I'm willing to best that next week we'll see an article on some other thing, whether true or not, where somebody leaked something to try to influence the policies they either agree with or disagree with, and that's irresponsible and damages our country.

NOVAK: All right. Now, apart from the Quadaffi situation, Senator, there have been a lot of leaks about intelligence operations over the last six months of all kinds.

SENATOR LEAHY: Yes.

NOVAK: And Congressman Henry Hyde, Republican of Illinois, has written to you and I believe every Senator, the Chairman of the Committee and the Chairman of the House Committee and suggested that staff and

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members of the Committee be given polygraph tests, lie detector tests, find out who is doing the leaking. What's wrong with that?

SENATOR LEAHY: I've no problem with that provided we ought to do the same thing to all those people in the Administration who have exactly the same access.

I've had time and time again, when I pick up the newspaper and look at the intelligence documents verbatim, and when I've called down and gotten hold of the staff that's cleared for these things and said, what's this about? They've said, we don't know. Nothing like that has ever come here. We search, call up the appropriate agencies, and they say, yes, we meant to have told you and the House about that, but we haven't gotten around to it. And yet the finger is pointed at congressional sources. This stuff has never even come there.

NOVAK: You're saying that the polygraph tests provided it was also given to the Administration.

SENATOR LEAHY: Provided it was given to everybody who has access to those things that are leaked, because at that point you're going to find out who's leaking them.

NOVAK: Is that feasible?

SENATOR LEAHY: I don't know. It depends, I suppose, on a case-by-case basis.

But the thing is, if you have a certain document that's been shown to 25 people it's pretty darn easy to do it. If you have something that's gone through several thousand, it's probably impossible.

But, then, let me tell you something. I came here during the Ford Administration, and I served on the Armed Services Committee at that time, so we had certain intelligence things we gathered. And I saw leaks happening in that Administration.

The next administration, the Carter Administration, it had gotten worse. And now with this Administration, it's even worse.

If we keep on at this rate, no President, Republican, Democrat, whatever, is going to be able to conduct....

EVANS: But, can a country survive?

SENATOR LEAHY: Not when it is the greatest military power in the world, or not when one of the two super powers are here to keep balances in this world, of course you can't survive like that.

EVANS: We have less than two minutes to go Senator. I just want to ask this brief question.

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Do you think that the -- at least the presumption that there are a lot of leaks out of the Senate and House Committees, what's in questioning the feasibility of having congressional oversight, over intelligence operations? Is it too great a risk for national security to let House members and Senators be given these secrets?

SENATOR LEAHY: If those -- if those leaks are coming from there. But my point is that the vast majority of leaks you see haven't even come to us. We read about them for the first time in the papers. These leaks come from somewhere else.

I think a lot of people who are concerned about having any oversight, including oversight of the budget, and including oversight of the mistakes made, like the Yurchenko case, would love to see the oversight, the House Intelligence Committee and the Senate Intelligence Committee take it over.

EVANS: Ninety seconds, 60 seconds left.

I know you say you don't want a witch hunt, you hope there won't be one. What should Congress do, however, to get more discipline in the CIA to prevent this kind of a -- of a saddle?

SENATOR LEAHY: Let's see what -- let's see what the results of -- let's see what happens here. And also, don't talk so soon. Mr. Casey is going to be very concerned, too. I mean, this happened on his watch. I'm not saying he's the one who ought to go down.

I think he'll be a bird dog on it. I really do, in going into it. We will, too.

NOVAK: So you're the bull dog and he'll be the blood hound.

EVANS: So, you don't predict a congressional witch hunt, but you do say there might be something of a purge within the agency?

SENATOR LEAHY: No, I'm saying that he will go in and look and we will go and look. Unless we know the facts, we won't answer your questions. I think it would be irresponsible to answer before we know the facts.

EVANS: Senator Leahy, thank you.

My partner and I will be back with comments in just a moment, after these messages.

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EVANS: Bob, there's something almost incredible about the whole Yurchenko affair, but there's nothing incredible about the way the Senator from Vermont, the Vice-chairman of the Intelligence Committee was talking today about what it means for American intelligence, what it means for the country.

He said that if he was in fact -- Yurchenko -- if he was a double agent, this was calamitous for America's intelligence, not -- not quite so bad if he came here as a genuine defector and then defected back to the Soviet Union. But he made it clear he thinks he was a double agent.

NOVAK: You know, I was struck by this Democratic Senator who is up for re-election and may be taking a tough re-election did not take this opportunity to blast the conduct of intelligence under a Republican Administration. Sure, he's going to have an investigation, but no witch hunt. And he didn't hit the controversial Republican CIA Director William Casey. In fact, he said Casey has the best intelligence operation in the world. It could be better, but that was high praise.

EVANS: Another thing also interested me, Bob, on his admission on leaks -- leaks, he said, could bring down a president. Leaks could bring down a country. We have to stop leaks. He even said he was willing -- it amazed me -- to take polygraph tests -- he and the members of the Senate Intelligence and House Intelligence Committees if all Administration officials who are privvy to secrets of an intelligence nature will also take polygraph -- lie detector tests. That's amazing.

NOVAK: Because, obviously Senator Leahy believes a lot of these terrible leaks are coming from the Administration, and there's a lot at stake because there are people who are saying that the oversight by Congress of intelligence that began in the post-Watergate era just doesn't work, that they leak too much up here, and that a great nation cannot let the legislative body oversee its intelligence.

We'll see. I'm Robert Novak.

EVANS: I'm Roland Evans. Be with us next week in our pre-summit interviews.

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